

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 6

Every Spiritual Blessing – Knowledge And Revelation

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Ephesians 1:9-10

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 1:9-10. This is a great text; this is a life giving text and I can't wait to get into it with you. I'll begin reading at verse 7 so that we can remember how we got here; hear then the Word of the Lord:

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight (Ephesians 1:7-8. ESV)

This is the passage we talked about last week. Paul says that we have been set free from slavery by means of a ransom price – the life and death of Jesus Christ. Sin is slavery; our minds were darkened and we were trapped in a dungeon of confusion and deceit. But now in Christ, we are free! Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom! We are free from confusion and self deception and now we can see the beauty and goodness of the Lord, we can see the sinfulness of our sin, we can see the grace of God's offer of salvation through the cross and it all makes sense to us! We are set free and in our freedom we immediately begin to move in the direction of wisdom and insight. I was blind, but now I see. In this work of grace God is:

⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

In order for us to appreciate the meaning of the first clause in verse 9 we are going to need to unpack that little phrase: “the mystery of his will”.

The mystery of his will...

The word mystery is used in the Bible in a very different way than it is generally used in our culture. We think of mystery as a problem to be solved – a murder or a conundrum. That’s not really the sense of it here. In the Bible a “mystery” is an open secret that can only be understood by supernatural revelation. Let me say that again: In the Bible a “mystery” is an open secret that can only be understood by supernatural revelation. You’ve heard me say before that most of what is made clear in the New Testament was present though unclear in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is kind of like a deep dark cave lit by a single lantern. We see things but only as shadow and outline. In Christ however and through the Holy Spirit now we see and understand and believe. The shadows disappear and the veil is removed. This is particularly true with respect to the person and work of Christ. In the Old Testament there were lots of prophecies about a conquering Messiah and there were also prophecies about a suffering servant but it was not clear that one person would embody both of these prophetic streams of anticipation and that is why many people did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah right from the start. They expected a king on a white horse and they got a healer and travelling rabbi who entered Jerusalem on a donkey and was crucified. They didn’t see how Jesus is BOTH Messiah and Saviour. They didn’t see how he would fulfil ALL of these prophecies in two separate seasons or comings. All of that seems very clear to us now, but to them it was an unfolding mystery. It was a secret being opened to them by the work of the Holy Spirit. That is what Paul is talking about here. He is saying: “I’m praising God today because he has opened our eyes to see and understand things once hid in shadow.”

Before we get to the content of our new insight and understanding let’s talk briefly about this little phrase “his will”.

There are two uses of the word “will” in the Bible with respect to God’s will. Theologians distinguish between the “preceptive will” of God and the “decretive will of God” and you always need to know which one you are dealing with in any given passage. Let me explain the difference. The “preceptive will” of God refers to his commands and moral imperatives. “Thou

shalt not murder”. It is very clear that in that command or precept God is expressing his will that we not kill each other. And yet we often do. People kill each other every day, wars are fought, babies are aborted, murders are committed. This is because God allows us to resist his preceptive will. God’s decretive will cannot be resisted. God’s decretive will refers to his Sovereign Decrees which govern the flow of history and time. Whatsoever God declares comes to pass. This is the will we are dealing with here. Paul isn’t saying: “I’m praising God that he has opened our eyes to see his moral commandments and precepts”, he is saying “I’m praising God today because he has opened our eyes to see his decree for the redemption and renewal of the universe!” That will cannot be resisted – it is the plan that governs the forward flow of history. God is Sovereign over all things, whatsoever, which shall ever come to pass. That is the plan that God is allowing us to see.

Stop right there and think about what that means. There is something absolutely huge right under your nose in this text. Understanding the grammar here helps us with the theology. The main verb in this whole clause comes from verse 8: “he lavished on us”. The main verb here, the principle actor in this unfolding sentence is the abundant grace of God. The abundant grace of God has done something and the supporting participle here in verse 9 translated as “made known” describes what is called “coincident action”. Meaning, he lavished his grace on us in all wisdom and insight IN THAT he made known to us the mystery of his will”. Let me say that in street level English. You seeing the plan of salvation is the fruit of God’s abundant grace. You would not have seen, appreciated and embraced the plan of salvation unless God had graciously opened your eyes to see it. That is what the text says, now let that hit you like a ton of bricks. That is the opposite; the EXACT OPPOSITE of how most of us instinctively think our salvation went down. Most of us think that when we saw the plan of salvation, when we got it, when we worked it out, then we opened a window to heaven and the grace of God unto salvation poured out. We think: “I understood and therefore received salvation”. The Bible says the exact opposite. The Bible says: “God opened your eyes and the first thing you did as a redeemed person was embrace the plan of salvation by repenting of your sin and trusting in Christ.” The Bible says enlightenment precedes repentance and faith. We think that we received enlightenment because we repented and believed. No! That would make you the hero of the story. That would suggest that you were so smart and so pious that God rewarded you with a new heart and the gift of the Spirit. Bully for you! Let’s build a church and worship you! But that’s not the story. That’s not what the Bible says. The Bible says God set you free from the

dungeon of darkness and self deceit and the first thing you did as a free man or woman was see Christ, repent of your sins and put your trust in him alone. That makes him the hero of the story and that is why we are here today to worship Jesus and not you. That is a huge truth and we so often blow by it on our rush to give ourselves credit for something we received as an unwarranted gift of grace. Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.

Alright now we need to get to the specific content of what God has opened our eyes to see. The plan of salvation is:

according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)

A plan to unite all things in him...

What we know so far is that God has opened our eyes by a Sovereign work of grace so that we can see now what was once revealed only in shadow and in secret. We can see now the plan of salvation which he has set forth in Christ. The word translated as “plan” there is the Greek *oikonomia* from which we get our English word “economy”. It means the manner in which God is working out his governing purposes for all of human history. That this plan will be worked out “for the fullness of time” means that this plan will bring human history in this present phase to its completion and conclusion. This is the plan for how this phase of post-fall, pre-eternal human history will be brought to its intended end. The plan is “to unite all things in him”. What does that mean?

The key word here, translated as “to unite” is what is called an explanatory infinitive. It is the verb that explains what we are talking about here. The word in Greek is *anakephalaiosis* which means “to bring all things under one headship”. The Greek word *kephale* means “head” or “headship” and so what we are talking about is God’s plan to bring everything in the universe under the sole headship or Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is the great plan of salvation.

Now let me illustrate that for you in a way that I think will make sense to you. Several times in the recent past we have talked about how “glorifying God” is like reorienting ourselves around God in Christ as our sole centre of gravity. The universe was created with the idea that it would

revolve around God as the centre of gravity. God is the biggest thing and the biggest thing should be at the centre. The word “glory” in Hebrew actually means “gravity”. God must be the biggest thing for the universe to work but in the fall mankind tried to put itself at the centre. We tried to be the point of reference for what is right and wrong and for what is good and bad; we invented lesser and more manageable gods – the Bible calls that idolatry and as a result the entire universe of humanity is in chaos. When there are multiple centres of gravity in a solar system there will be chaos, collision and calamity. If you are god, and I am god and she is god and he is god and we’re all orbiting around ourselves as self centred beings then society is going to be chaotic, and full of conflict. There will be no order, no law, no harmony. That is the present state of the universe under the dominion of sin. Redemption is when God sets us free from that madness and chaos. He touches our heart, opens our eyes and the first thing we see is the biggest thing. We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus and we immediately respond by hating our own self centeredness, recognizing our selfishness as the cause of the chaos and conflict in our lives, and seeing and understanding the beauty and rightness of God in Christ we repent and trust in and submit to his benevolent Lordship. We are planets now back in our rightful orbit. We are now already, citizens in the eternal kingdom. The eternal kingdom is a universe with ONE SINGLE CENTRE OF GRAVITY – THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. When you are redeemed you are already in your eternal orbit. BUT - you live for the time being in a solar system filled with rogue planets centred on themselves and hurtling from conflict to conflict. But that state of affairs won’t last forever. God has a plan to bring every body into orbit around one centre of gravity. One Son will rule them all and the universe will return to harmony, peace and beauty centred on the glory of God in Christ.

That’s the plan! That’s what we see now because of God’s grace lavished upon us in Christ. It is beautiful and it is reason enough to praise the Lord. Before we wrestle with some massive implications, let me just summarize in plain English what Paul has just said. If Paul were here today speaking English to us in Orillia in the 21st century he might have said it this way:

“I’m excited, I’m stoked, I’m totally jacked up (he might not have said jacked up), I’m overflowing in praise to God today, because he’s opened our eyes to see the plan of salvation, which is the way in which he is bringing all things in the universe under the sole and benevolent headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is great news and I’m totally stoked!”

That's what Paul is saying and it is still reason to stand up and bless the Lord! That's a big truth and that truth needs to rattle around in our brains a little bit and rearrange some other thoughts and assumptions that we may have had. There are two areas in particular where I think this truth needs to exert some influence on how we think and behave as redeemed people. I want to guide you through that this morning by asking a couple of really big questions:

Q1: What are the implications of this truth for us as individual believers?

If all of that is true, if we've embraced the plan of salvation, if we've seen our sin and seen Jesus only because of God's intervention and lavish grace and if God is working a Sovereign plan to bring everything in the universe under the headship of Jesus Christ than what does that mean for us as individual believers? What are the implications? At least two come immediately to mind:

1. It means we as little planets need to keep our faces focused on the Son

Listen to me little Christian, if you have been caught up in this great plan then you need to understand that you were once and by nature a very rebellious and troublesome little body. When you were self centred and orbiting around yourself and your little constellation of idols you were a hazard to yourself and the rest of the natural universe. You were an agent of chaos and conflict. That is who you were by nature, by birth and so now that by God's grace you've been set back in orbit don't think for a second that you don't need to steward that. What does the old hymn say? "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." Your heart is a naturally rebellious and wandering cosmic body. You need to fix it on orbit around the son. Fix your eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith. Behold the face of Jesus, and as we all with unveiled faces behold the glory of God we will be transformed, by one degree of glory to the next. That is your life work now, first and foremost. Look at Jesus. Study his life. Study the Old Testament so that you can understand how he is the answer to all those questions, how he is the fulfilment of all those promises.

Theologians often say that salvation is a one handed work – God does it all. Sanctification is a two handed work – we have to make use of the means that God provides for our growth and "orbit management". Those ordinary means are simple, ordinary things like corporate worship – the preaching of the Word and the ordinances of communion and baptism; personal Bible reading

and prayer and the regular practice of church fellowship. Those are the ordinary means of ORBIT MANAGEMENT. This is how you tune your cosmic body to maintain a steady orbit around the central headship of Jesus Christ. When you wobble and wobble – as we all do from time to time – you will become an agent of collision and conflict in the lives of other people. You will hurt yourself, you will hurt others and you will rob God of glory. Confess that and get back into the ordinary means of grace unto Christian growth. That really is the first and most important thing for you as a believer. Before you can be any good as a missionary or as a witness, you need to maintain your orbit because if you yourself are an agent of chaos in the universe, how will you serve as a useful ambassador for the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Your own personal chaos will undermine whatever witness you may offer to the glory of God in Christ. If you think you can go out there and witness for Jesus without regular weekly corporate worship, without sitting under the Word of God preached, without participating in the ordinances, without private devotion and corporate fellowship you are worse than a fool. You will not be part of the solution you will be the problem. You will be an agent of chaos working against the plan of God to bring all things into orbit around the one Lord Jesus Christ.

2. It means we as little planets need to expect on-going collision and catastrophe until this plan has had its full effect

As God touches one heart after another and restores them to their new orbit around Christ those planets are immediately in the eternal kingdom – they are in the self same orbit they will enjoy throughout all eternity – BUT – they continue to exist in a universe in transition. They may be on their regular orbit but many other cosmic bodies continue to be self centred and idol centred and therefore we must expect on-going collision and catastrophe. Jesus said:

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33. ESV)

In the world you will have tribulation. People are going to smash into you because they are self centred and idol-orbiting. Meteors and comets are going to slam into you with catastrophic force of impact because the plan hasn't been fully worked out yet. The universe is still partially in chaos. Bad things are going to happen and you are not immune from those things. But take heart. You know where this is going and you see how it ends. Endure these things with patience and grace. Little planets who themselves have only recently been rescued out of rebellion and

chaos need to be patient and realistic about the state of the universe still labouring under the effects of the curse.

The second really big question we need to ask as we wrestle with the implications of this teaching is:

Q2: What are the implications of this truth for us as ambassadors of the kingdom?

So we are planets restored to an orbit we need to steward and maintain but the Bible also says that we are ambassadors for the kingdom of God, or put another way, we are ambassadors for the central Lordship and Headship of Jesus Christ over all things. What are the implications of these truths on the way we address that mandate? If it's true for example that enlightenment precedes repentance and faith, how should we do evangelism? Two pretty obvious implications come to mind.

1. We can't argue people into the kingdom of God

Think about that. Paul has just said that prior to our redemption we were slaves, bound in chains of confusion and self deception. We couldn't see the goodness of God, we couldn't see the sinfulness of sin and we never would have seen any of that unless God had lavished grace upon us. If that was true for us – if it was true that no amount of thinking or looking or searching on our part and no amount of explaining or harassing or arguing on the part of loved ones trying to reach us was sufficient to unlock these mysteries, why then do we so naturally assume that we can unlock them for other in this way? We can't. You can't argue or harass people into the kingdom of God. They won't get it. You can tell them about the goodness of God and they'll look at you like you are telling them about the goodness of the Tooth Fairy. You can tell them about the sinfulness of sin and they'll be thinking in their minds that you just need to chill out. They don't see it. Arguing therefore, is not an effective means of evangelism. If God has to open their eyes to see, you turning up the dimmer switch on all your Gospel truth presentations is really neither here nor there. You can shout at the top of your lungs at someone, but if they are dead in their sins they will not hear a word you are saying. Dead people hear poorly.

Now that being true, I don't think that means that apologetics serves no purpose whatsoever. Apologetics is the science or practice of making a reasoned defence of the Christian faith. I am not saying that apologetics is not useful. But I am saying that apologetics can never close the deal. There will never come a day when you spike your Bible on the ground having completely levelled the Darwinian Materialist worldview so that you can help Richard Dawkins into the tank for public baptism and profession of faith. That just isn't how it works. The secular Darwinian Materialist worldview is a presuppositional faith system just as Christianity is a presuppositional faith system which means that neither can ever defeat the other on the basis of rational argument. What apologetics can do is preserve disquiet in the soul of the unbeliever. Sometimes doctors will put an accident victim into a medically induced coma until they have had the time to treat certain presenting trauma. They are basically slowing or freezing the body's natural trajectory into death so that they can let the treatment have its intended effect. Apologetics can serve that same function. By showing that Christianity is not illogical and that this faith claim can indeed be the key that unlocks the meaning of the universe they slow the unbelievers rush into scepticism and self centred narcissism. They do that to buy time for the unbeliever's heart to soften under the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Apologetics can be a useful implement in your evangelism tool kit but it can never close the deal. We don't arrive at the place of saving faith by walking down the path of human reason. The human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?

Secondly and lastly then:

2. We must therefore pray and present a faithful witness and rest in the Sovereign Grace of God.

If it's true that we are ambassadors for the kingdom and if it's true that we cannot argue or nag or harass lost people into conversion than all that remains to us is prayer, faithful witness and the Sovereign Grace of God. That totally takes the pressure off doesn't it? You don't have to "open their eyes" – only God can do that. You need to pray for them. Prayer is evangelism. Pray! Lift them up before the Lord. When the old Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter arrived at the town of Kidderminster there were 2000 people in it and scarcely a one knew the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He ascended a hill overlooking the city and he prayed faithfully for the city, house by house and when he left, having prayed and taught, prayed and taught, prayed and taught he records: "there

were some streets where there was not past one family in the side of the street that did not so". Nearly the entire city was converted through these simple means. Prayer and the faithful teaching of the Gospel. That's how we do it. We pray for the lost. We pray for our loved ones and our neighbours. We ask God to open their eyes and soften their hearts and then we hold up Christ. They may reject it, they may see nothing of beauty or relevance. We pray again. We hold up Christ again. We do this again and again and again and then one day, with no fresh innovation or methodology on our part – one day their eyes are opened. They see and they come forth from the grave like Lazarus. That's how it happens. One day God touches their heart and opens their eyes and the first thing they do with those eyes is see the truth of their sin and the beauty of Christ and they repent and they believe and they assume their new born orbit around the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what God is doing and it is marvellous in our sight. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And all God's people said, amen.